

## Variant winter plumage in the Scaup

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In previous notes we have described a variant winter plumage in female Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula* Boie, <sup>1,2,3</sup> in which the normally white underparts are flecked with dark brown and we suggested that this was probably a reversionary variant towards a dark belly, such as occurs in some other species in the genus *Aythya*.

The occurrence of a similar variant in the Scaup, *Aythya marila* (Linnaeus), another normally white-bellied species, supports this view. In a series of 36 in our collections, three exhibit minimal but definite dark brown flecking of the belly. They are as follows:—

1. 23rd October, 1886: Holy Island, Northumberland.  
♂ Juvenile Ex. collection  
Abel Chapman.
2. 21st January, 1939: Rye Harbour, Sussex.  
♀ Ad.
3. 16th February, 1934: Tetney, Lincolnshire.  
♀ First winter.

Of the four Tufted Duck which we have recorded as showing this type of variant, one was not sexed, but the other three were all females moulting into or in first winter plumage. It will be noted that of these three Scaup one is a juvenile male, one a first winter female and one an adult female. In this respect it is to be noted that Bryan Sage<sup>4</sup>, in his paper on Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (Güldenstädt) x Tufted Duck *A. fuligula* hybrids records a similar type of plumage in one such hybrid collected in Holland, this bird apparently being an adult female.

The fact that the hybridisation of these two white-bellied species can result in a dark-bellied hybrid brings this character into the same category as the bimaculated facial pattern revealed in hybrids involving the Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos* Linnaeus; Wigeon, *Anas penelope* Linnaeus; Teal, *Anas crecca* Linnaeus, and Shoveler, *Anas clypeata* Linnaeus<sup>5</sup>, and also in variants of the Teal resembling in this pattern the Baikal Teal, *Anas formosa* Georgi<sup>6</sup>, in which there is no question of hybridisation.

While confirming our views as to the probable evolutionary significance of the dark flecking in female Tufted Duck, Sage (*loc. cit.*) remarks that the occurrence of such characters in other *Aythya* species would strongly support this theory. It is of interest therefore to be able to record this variant as occurring in the Scaup.

### References:—

- <sup>1</sup> Harrison, James M. and Jeffery G. "On varieties of the Tufted Duck, with an account of an unrecorded type of variation". *Bull. B.O.C.* Vol. 80, pp. 25-28. 1960.
- <sup>2</sup> Harrison, James M. and Jeffery G. "Further remarks on female plumages of the Tufted Duck". *Bull. B.O.C.* Vol. 80, 141-2.
- <sup>3</sup> Harrison, James M. and Jeffery G. "Variant winter plumage of the female Tufted Duck". *Bull. B.O.C.* Vol. 81, 103-105.
- <sup>4</sup> Sage, Bryan L. "Notes on some Ferruginous White-eye x Tufted Duck hybrids". *Bull. B.O.C.* In press.
- <sup>5</sup> Harrison, James M. "Comments on a Wigeon x Northern Shoveler hybrid". *Bull. B.O.C.* Vol. 79, pp. 142-151. 1959.
- <sup>6</sup> Harrison, James M. "The Baikal Teal in the British Isles; a new record and a note on the "Bridled" Face Pattern". *Bull. B.O.C.* Vol. 78, pp. 105-107. 1958.